

7 Interesting Inner Seas Facts

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The Inner Seas off the West Coast of Scotland is a network of coastal waters, sounds, islands, and sea lochs. The International Hydrographic Organisation designates it as a marine area. The several waterbodies that comprise the Inner Seas lie between the Scottish Mainland, the Outer Hebrides Islands and the coast of Ireland.

Several Water bodies comprise the Inner Seas, including Minch and Little Minch, the Sound of Harris, the Inner Sound, the Sea of the Hebrides, the Firth of Lorn, the Sound of Jura, the Firth of Clyde, Belfast Lough and the North Channel.

This article will discuss some interesting facts about the Inner Seas.



Screengrab from Google maps

1. Formation of the Inner Seas

The Inner Seas were formed mainly due to glacial erosion in the last ice age, around 11,000 to 10,000 years ago. Ice sheets extended southwards from the Scottish Highlands across the region now called the Inner Seas.

Ice sheets advanced and retreated for thousands of years, carving out valleys that formed sea lochs such as Loch Linnhe and Loch Fyne. They also made deeper channels that linked the sea lochs and became sounds like the Sound of Jura and the Sound of Mull.

Basins were carved by glacial erosion. They were flooded after the ice melted, forming massive water bodies like Firth of Lorn and Firth of Clyde. As ice sheets scoured the

landmasses, they deposited soil, rock and other debris, which, over millions of years, formed the base of the islands.

Around 10,000 years ago, when the last glacial period was about to end, [sea levels](#) rose enough to flood all the channels, sounds and lochs carved by the ice sheets.

The process of erosion and deposition refined the coastlines for thousands of years, but the basic shape and configuration of the Inner Seas dates back to the last ice age.

2. Shipping in the Inner Seas

All the water bodies that make up the Inner Seas offer ferry connections to nearby settlements and are well linked to each other by waterways. Worth mentioning is the Firth of Clyde, which is known for its shipbuilding industry.

Glasgow, Clydebank, and Renfrew are key engineering and shipbuilding centres. Major shipyards lie at Greenock and Port Glasgow, while smaller ones are at Troon, Irvine and Ardrossan. Several boatyards are situated at Hunters Quay, Port Bannatyne and Fairlie. The Ferguson Marine shipbuilding yard, Port Glasgow, is the last merchant shipbuilder on the Clyde.

Firth of Clyde also boasts one of the deepest sea entrance channels in Northern Europe, which can accommodate the biggest [Capesize ships](#). Hunterston Terminal was built to handle bulk ore and dealt with coal and closed in 2016. Supertankers sail up the Firth to transport crude oil to Finnart Oil Terminal in Loch Long, linked via pipeline to the Grangemouth Refinery on the Firth of Forth. The Royal Navy also has a major presence here, at HMNB Clyde on the Gare Loch and Loch Long.



Representation Image

Belfast Lough is a water body within the Inner Seas known for sailing. It has three marines, at Bangor, Carrickfergus and Titanic Quarter. The famous shipbuilder of the Titanic fame, Harland & Wolff, is based at the Belfast Docks. In 1912, the Titanic sailed down the lough from Belfast to the Irish Sea for its sea trials.

The lough has two Royal Yacht Clubs, the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club and the Royal Ulster. The open waters span 30 square miles, and the lough's coastline is enough for day-long races.

3. Geography of the Inner Seas

The Inner Seas has a varied and diverse geography and topographical features ranging from islands, peninsulas, lochs and channels that branch off from the large water bodies. There are sounds, firths and cliffs on the coastline.

The Minch and Little Minch, a part of the Inner Seas off the West Coast of Scotland, are also the site of the biggest meteorite ever to hit the British Isles.

The Sound of Harris offers the main sea route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Minch through the Hebridean archipelago. Inner Sound has the deepest section of Britain's territorial waters, with a maximum depth of 324 m.

The Sea of Hebrides is a well-sheltered section of the North Atlantic Ocean. The Firth of Lorn is a continuation of the Great Glen Fault that runs along the Firth. Rock platforms and cliffs surround its coasts.

Belfast Lough is an internal sea inlet on the eastern coast of Northern Island. The Port of Belfast lies at its head. The Lough opens into the North Channel and links Belfast to the Irish Sea.

Belfast Lough is long and deep, free from strong tides. It has mudflats, lagoons, rocky shores and small sandy bays. The main towns around it include Bangor, Holywood, Helen's Bay, Whitehead, and Greenisland.

4. Conservation Projects in the Inner Seas

The Minch Project is one such initiative to reduce erosion, minimise pollution and promote tourism, especially wildlife tourism like dolphin watching in the Minch. A major concern is pollution, as it is a busy shipping route.

Firth of Lorn has a Special Area of Conservation, focussing on rocky reef habitats. The entire firth became a Marine Protected Area in 2014. The Great Cumbrae has a marine biological station, too.

Firth of Clyde is known for common and grey seals, harbour porpoises and basking shark sightings. Scotland's first No Take Zone was established in 2008 in Lamash Bay to protect maerl, a slow-growing coral-like red algae, an important Scottish species. Maerl Beds act as nursery grounds for scallops and fish.

Maerl is threatened by scallop dredging and organic waste from fish farms. The former kills about 70% of maerl. Maerl beds need to be left undisturbed for many years to recover.

The Belfast Lough Ramsar site covers an area of 432.14 hectares. In 2020, the Sea of Hebrides was designated as a Marine Protected Area. The region spans 10,039 km², and the decision was made to protect the region's basking sharks and minke whales.

5. Fishing and Tourism activities

Fishing in the water bodies which make up the Inner Seas usually revolves around shellfish and crustaceans. Dredgers and trawlers can be used in some places. Static fishing includes setting nets and creels for crawfish, crabs, pots and nets. There is also commercial diving for shellfish.



Representation Image

Marine tourism comprises scuba diving, wildlife watching, sea angling and boating tours. Steam-powered PS Waverley also makes cruise trips to the coastal towns that have been popular destinations since the 19th century. Many historical castles also attract people to these places. [Ocean liners](#) usually visit Greenock, and there are ferry connections, too. Cargo ships and oil tankers are also seen here.

6. Lighthouses and other navigational aids

The Minch's entrance in the south is marked by [lighthouses](#) Ushenish and Hyskeir at Barra Head. There are lights at Vaternish and Neist Point, and the Outer Hebrides are also marked by Eilean Glas, Butt of Lewis, while to the east lie Stoer Head, Cape Wrath lighthouses. A buoy is placed to mark the Eugenie Rock and the Sgeir Graidach.



Representation Image

Several lighthouses lie at Firth of Clyde, such as the Cloch Point on the Inverclyde coast, little Cumbrae and Pladda. Navigation beacons are present at Gantocks Rocks and off the coast of Dunoon.

7. Has a moderate climate throughout the year

The climate in this region is temperate marine, and the temperatures remain moderate all year round. Average temperatures in summer range from 15-18 degrees Celsius; in winter, they are between 5-8 degrees Celsius.

Westerly winds carry moisture, and annual rainfall averages 1000 to 1500 mm. Winter storms can be quite strong with powerful winds.

The area has a very wet climate due to westerly winds bringing moisture off the Atlantic Ocean. Annual rainfall averages 1000-1500 mm (39-59 inches). Rain can fall on most days, even in summer. Sea fog is also common in summer and may last for days. Winters are mild, and summers are cool.
